

The Intercessor

By May Sinclair

I

THEY had told him that he couldn't miss it. There wasn't another house near it for a good mile. He knew where the bridle-path from the hill road struck the lane in the Bottom. It was down there, with a clump of ash-trees close up against the back of it, trying to hide it.

Garvin followed the path. It went straight over the slope of the fields, hemmed in by stone walls, low and loose piled, part of the enormous network of stone flung across the north country to the foot of the fells.

At the end of the last field a wild plum-tree stood half-naked on a hillock and pointed at the house. All that Garvin could see was a bald gable-end pitched among the ash-trees. It was black grey, like ash bark drenched with rain.

It stood, he now saw, in a little orchard of dead trees, shut in from the fields by walls, low and loose piled, a plot so small that it showed like a loop in a mesh of the stone network.

As he approached the place he had the distinct thrill of fascination that seized him always in the presence of old things.

Garvin was by nature and profession a hunter of old things, of old houses, old churches, old ways and superstitions. He had had his nose in a hundred parish registers, sifting the dust of oblivion for a clue to some forgotten family. He was gifted with an implacable persistence in following up a trail, a terrible and untiring industry in minute research. His almost legal precision had served him well when he left an estate agent's office in Pall Mall to work for the Blackadders on their County History.

The Blackadder enterprise was so vast that Garvin in his operations was a mere fly-wheel of the machinery. But it fired him; it gave him scope. As an estate agent, selling land for building lots, Garvin had done violence to his genius. The dream of Garvin and his passion was for wild open stretches, everlastingly unbuilt on, for moors and fells, for all places that have kept the secret and the memory of the ancient earth. It was this queer, half-savage streak in the respectable Garvin that marked him as *the* man for the Craven country.

He had travelled the district all summer, working up his notes at night in small humble hotels and wayside inns. But when it came to the actual writing of his section, Garvin had taken rooms in a village in Craven. He had insisted on two things only when he took them, that the house must be old and that there must be no children in it. That was in

THE INTERCESSOR

July. And before August other lodgers had come and had brought many children. Garvin was driven out. He said he *must* have a place to himself, and was told, fairly and squarely, in broad Yorkshire, that he couldn't have it; leastways, not in August. If he wasn't satisfied where he was, he could go to Falshaw's in the Bottom. Likely enough he'd have it to himself there as much as he wanted.

Garvin ignored the hint of perdition. He inquired placably if Falshaw's was an old place, and was told that it was "old enough." He asked also whether at Falshaw's there would be any children. No (this time it was palpable, the sidelong, sinister intention), there wouldn't be; leastways not in August nor yet September—if all went well with Falshaw's wife. Garvin judged that the state of Falshaw's wife had acted somehow as a deterrent to tourists. It had kept Falshaw's empty. That was good. Anyhow he thought he'd risk it.

It was early evening in the first week of August that he set out for the house in the Bottom.

It didn't strike him (for the approach was sideways through a little gate in the low wall), it didn't strike him all at once that the house was not "old enough." But it struck him very sharply as he entered and took in, slant-ways, its bare rectangular front. So far from being old enough (for Garvin) it was not old at all, if you went by years. He had given it about a hundred at sight, when he came upon its date graved above the lintel of its door: 1800, and the initials of its founder: E. F.

If you went by years—but this gaunt and naked thing had grown old before its years. It wore the look of calamity, of terrible and unforgetting and unforgotten age. What it did was to throw back its century into some tract of dark and savage time.

He stepped back a few paces to get a better look at it. The unsheltered door stood open; its flagged passage, flush with the ground outside it, showed like a continuation of the orchard path. At the further gable-end its wall was broken half-way by the roof of a pent-house. A clump of elder bushes here were the only green and living things about the place. It stood before Garvin, dark and repellent in its nakedness, built from floor to roof of that bleak stone that abhors the sun, that blackens under rain. The light of the August evening was grey round it; the heat of the August day lived only in the rank smell of the elder bushes by the pent-house wall. It seemed to Garvin that the soul of eighteen hundred hung about him in the smell of the elder bushes. He found it in the blurred gleam of the five windows, deep set and narrow, that looked out on the orchard of dead trees. Garvin's delicate sense of time was shaken under their poignant, impenetrable stare, so that the figures 1800 troubled him, stirred in him the innermost thrill of his passion for the past.

He knocked with his stick on the open door. The sounds struck short and hard. Nobody answered. Garvin took another look at the house. The wall-space to the left of the threshold was narrow and had but one window, which he had passed as he entered. The long, two-windowed wall on the right bounded the house place. Garvin saw

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

through the open door that this interior was diminished by two wooden partitions, one of which formed the passage, the other shut off the staircase at the back. The door at the end of the passage was closed. So was the door on his left, leading into the small room he had passed. The door in the partition on his right stood ajar, so that when he knocked again he heard the loud scraping of a chair on the stone floor. Somebody had got up and was probably listening there, but nobody came. He knocked again on the inner door imperiously.

This time he heard footsteps. They advanced heavily to the door and paused there. The door swung to with a click of the latch and the footsteps retreated. They trailed off somewhere into the depths of the house to the back. Somebody called out there to somebody else, "Onny! Onny!" and Garvin waited.

Some moments passed before the door at the end of the passage (the door into the backyard) opened, and a girl, whom he took to be Anny, came to him. She was a young girl, sturdy and full-blown in the body, florid and fair in the face; in all commonplace and a little coarse. She came heavily, with no sign of interest or of haste, but staring at Garvin with her thick grey eyes.

He asked if he could have rooms. Anny didn't know, she was sure.

Would she be good enough to find out?

She didn't know. He could find out himself. Ooncle was in the tool-shed.

With more good-will than her speech indicated she led the way to the shed under the elder bushes.

There was no one there. Anny now reckoned that Ooncle would be in the mist-house.

A gate in the wall behind the elder bushes opened into the mist-house yard. Falshaw was alone there, pitching dung from the cow-shed. At the girl's call he came forward, leaning on his pitchfork. He was a big man, thick in the girth, and fair like his niece, and florid. Garvin reckoned his age at fifty or thereabouts. For in his body, built for power, the muscles had begun to slacken; it was sunken in its secret foundations. Garvin supposed that this was because of Falshaw's age. What baffled him was the contradiction between Falshaw's face and its expression. It was natural that Falshaw should grow old; but what had Falshaw done that his face, formed by nature in an hour of genial grossness, should have all its contours tortured to that look of irremediable gloom?

The gloom did not lift as the big man slouched nearer, and (contemptuous of the stranger's greeting) inquired what Garvin wanted. His manner intimated that whatever it was Garvin would probably have to want it.

As to whether Garvin could put up at Falshaw's, Falshaw, like his niece, didn't know, he was sure. It depended upon whether the missus could "put oop" with Garvin.

Garvin, suddenly remembering what he had heard about Falshaw's wife, protested that his requirements would be slight. Falshaw did not know about that either, he was sure; but he reckoned that Garvin

THE INTERCESSOR

would have to ask the missus. The missus was "oop there," in the house.

He was about to leave Garvin to deal with the situation when he seemed to think better of it, and to have decided that, after all, he would see him through. All this time he had clung to his pitchfork. He now planted it firmly in the earth to await his return. He seemed to leave it with reluctance and regret.

The girl Anny smiled as if she was pleased at the turn affairs were taking. Garvin thought he saw hope for himself in Anny's smile.

As they reached the door that had been shut against Garvin, Falshaw drew himself up and squared his shoulders with a tightening of all his muscles. He seemed to take the young man under his protection with an air of dogged courage in seeing him through. It struck Garvin then that Falshaw was afraid of his wife.

She sat in twilight and slant-wise from the doorway, so that she had her back both to them and to the light. The sound of the lifted latch had been answered by a loud and sudden scraping of her chair; it was like a shriek of fright. She rose as Garvin entered, and turned, as if she suffered the impulse of the pregnant woman to hide herself.

He approached her, uttering some such soft and inarticulate sound as he would have used to soothe a shy animal. As she swung heavily round and faced him he saw that he was likely to be mistaken as to Mrs. Falshaw's impulses. Otherwise he would have said that it was she who was afraid. But whatever her instinct was, fear or hostility, it already was submerged in the profound apathy of her gloom.

For the expression on Falshaw's face was a mere shadow fallen on it from his wife's face, where gloom and heaviness had entered into the substance of the flesh and the structure of the bone. Gloom was in the very fibre of her hair, a dull black, rusted.

It was Falshaw, with his air of protection, who put it to her whether it would be possible for them to take Garvin in.

"Ya know how *thot'll* end," said she significantly.

Things had happened, then, at Falshaw's. The gloom on Falshaw's face renewed Garvin's impression that Falshaw, perhaps, on account of these things, was afraid of his wife. He looked from her to his niece Anny, who stood leaning awkwardly against the dresser and twisting and untwisting a corner of her apron. There was a queer, half-frightened, half-sullen look on her face. And Garvin received a further impression, that the things that had happened at Falshaw's were connected unpleasantly with Falshaw's niece. It might well be. The girl was coarse.

By way of establishing his own incorruptibly moral character, Garvin drew a portrait of himself as a respectable, intellectual dry-as-dust, alien to human interests and emotions, intolerant of the society of his kind. So much so that he was obliged to stipulate that wherever he lodged there must be no other lodgers, and no children.

"There'll be no other lodgers. You can depend on *thot*," said Falshaw.

"And—no children?"

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

The girl Anny stirred uneasily. Her face, florid a second ago, was white as Garvin looked at it. She hid her hands in her apron, turned on her heel abruptly, and left the room.

Then Garvin was sure that he knew. *That* was the trouble in the house. Falshaw's eyes followed his niece as she went out. There was some tenderness in the gross man, and plainly he was sorry for the girl. But his wife's face had tightened; it had grown even more forbidding than it had been. The woman, Garvin judged, had been hard on Anny. He could see Anny being ground under that nether millstone.

Of course they would resent his touching on the sore point, but it happened to be the point on which Garvin himself was uneasy, and he really had to settle it. He approached it gently and with some confusion.

"I was told——" he began, and hesitated.

"What were ya told?" said Falshaw.

"Why—that there weren't any."

"Speak oop. Ah doan' understand ya."

Garvin plunged. "I mean—any children. I say, you know, there aren't any, really, are there?" He plunged deeper. "I mean, of course, in the house." And deeper still. "I mean—at present."

"There's noa fear o' thot—here."

It was Falshaw's wife who spoke.

II

It was as if the heart of her gloom had suddenly found utterance. Silence followed it.

They had seated themselves round the deep open hearth-place, Garvin on the settle facing Mrs. Falshaw, and Falshaw in the middle facing his hearth. His attitude indicated that he was seeing Garvin through, not because he liked him or approved of him, but as a simple matter of justice between man and man.

He did not look at Garvin when he spoke to him. He had not looked straight at him since he had brought him into the house. He seemed unable to face another man fairly and squarely in the presence of his wife. That might be, Garvin supposed, either because he was afraid of her or because his consciousness of approaching fatherhood had made him shy. Now, as his wife spoke, he turned on Garvin a dumb and poignant look that besought his pity and his comprehension. It was as if he had said, "You see what's wrong with her"; as if he were letting him into the secret of her malady, of the gloom that hung about them both. And Garvin understood that the unfortunate woman had fallen into some melancholy incidental to her state. She had got it into her head that the unborn thing had died within her or would die. A curse was on her. She would never be the mother of a living child.

She sat there, leaning forward, propping her weight with hands planted on her thighs, and staring at the hearth, a creature bowed and stupefied

THE INTERCESSOR

with her burden. Her husband leaned forward too, staring as she stared, moved to a like attitude by sympathy. He pushed out his loose lips from time to time, as if he said, "That's how it takes her. That's how it takes her."

Garvin's delicacy prompted him to inquire whether it would be inconvenient for Mrs. Falshaw to take him in.

At this innocent query Falshaw actually smiled. It was the most extraordinary smile. Without altering the expression of his face it went quivering through his whole vast bulk, as if his body were invaded by a malign mirth. It became articulate.

"We woan't," said Falshaw, "put *ourselves* out for anybody."

Garvin took this as an intimation in the northern manner that he was to consider himself at home.

Falshaw now approached his wife so near as to reckon that they could let the young mon have the parlour and the back bedroom, and Mrs. Falshaw replied from the depths of her apathy that he, Falshaw, could do as he liked.

A brief inspection showed Garvin that his quarters, though small, were incomparably clean. He moved into them in the afternoon of the next day.

He was pleased with the cool stone-flagged parlour. Its narrow walls concentrated the light in a clear equable stream on his table under the window. He ranged his books on the top of the low cupboard that flanked the fireplace; and, if the room was still cold and strange to him, he had only to look at them to feel instantly at home. Nobody interfered with him.

It was his bedroom that made him realise that Falshaw had meant what he said. They weren't going to put themselves out for anybody, not they. Garvin's expert eye had measured the resources of the house, and he knew that he had got the worst bedroom in it. It was such a room as is only given to a servant even in houses like the Falshaws'. And nobody had turned out of it for him. With all its cleanness, it had the musty smell of long disuse. Garvin, however, preferred this smell to any kindred sign that might suggest recent habitation. Apart from its appearance and the smell, the room inspired him with a profound discomfort and distrust. He prowled about in it for half an hour, searching in vain for possible sources of this feeling.

So little did the Falshaws put themselves out that nobody came upstairs to tell the lodger that his tea was waiting for him in the parlour. He drank it lukewarm and stewed to an abominable blackness. A delicious scent of home-baked bread and hot girdle-cakes came from the Falshaws' kitchen, while Garvin sniffed suspicion at a sour loaf and a slab of salt butter from the village shop. Bacon from the shop appeared at his supper, its rankness intensified by a savour of hot stew wafted through the doorway. He ventured to ask Anny if he couldn't have some of the new bread he had smelt baking, and was told that they only baked once a week for themselves. The idea seemed to be that any food cooked

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

by the Falshaws was sacred to the tribe. He wouldn't be allowed to eat it.

But Garvin was ready to endure any privation of mere appetite in the satisfaction of his passion for peace, and peace (he could feel it) was what he had found at Falshaw's.

Before going to bed he had assured himself that he had his side of the house entirely to himself. He found out that the girl Anny slept with Mrs. Falshaw in the large front room over the kitchen. He supposed that this arrangement was unavoidable if they wanted to keep the young minx out of harm's way. As for Falshaw, he was lodged in a commodious chamber next his wife's, covering both the parlour and the passage. Garvin's room was certainly not commodious. The roof of the house, low and short on the front of it, long and steep-pitched on the back, dwarfed Garvin's room to the proportions of a garret. The space on this side of the house was further taken up by a landing, lighted through a small pane in the slope of the roof.

The doors of the three rooms opened on to the landing. There was also, at the top of a short stair, a fourth door, opposite Garvin's. This door was locked (Garvin in his fastidious curiosity had tried it). But the wall, flanking the well of the staircase, reassured him. There could be no width behind it for anything bigger than a box room. Garvin was certain of his peace.

Oh, certain. At evening an almost unnatural stillness had fallen on the place. It was in the house, in the orchard, and in the yard down there under the ash-trees. It deepened with each hour of the night. He was almost oppressed with his sense of it as he lay in bed, waiting for the sleep which he knew would be shy of visiting him in his strange quarters.

He would have had a better chance—as far as sleeping went—if there *had* been some noise about ; some noise, that was to say, outside his own body. For in the silence, Garvin's body, with all its pulses, had become a centre of intolerable clamour.

Garvin's body grew quiet. He was deliciously, delicately aware of the approach of sleep, of sleep entering his veins, of sleep and silence and oblivion flooding his brain, his heart, submerging him, or just submerging, when, with a terrible vain resistance and resentment, he found himself being drawn out of it.

What amazed him as he came up was the slenderness of the thread that drew him, a sound so fragile, so thin, that he was almost unaware of it as sound. His resentment flamed to indignation as the thing became audible and recognisable, distinctly recognisable, as the crying of a child.

It came from one of the upper rooms : it was hardly a crying, a sobbing, a whimpering rather, muffled by closed doors. The wonder was how it could have waked him ; the sound was so distant, so smothered, so inarticulate.

It went on for a long time, and Garvin could not say whether it ceased or whether he slept through it. He knew he did sleep.

THE INTERCESSOR

III

In the morning he was aware that, as the victim of their deception, he was more interesting to the Falshaws than he had been overnight. Returning from a stroll before breakfast, he found Mrs. Falshaw standing in the door of the house and watching him. She slunk away at his approach and shut the kitchen door between them. Falshaw, encountered in the passage, eyed him stealthily with suspicion that turned at close quarters to defiance, as much as to say that, if Garvin was up to anything, he, Falshaw, was ready for him.

Garvin would have dealt with Falshaw then and there but for the presence of the girl Anny, who was stationed in the doorway of the parlour, watching also. She lingered in her waiting on him, and he discerned in her thick eyes a vague animal terror, half-spiritualised by an unspoken, an unspeakable appeal. It was borne in on him that her change of attitude was somehow connected with the disturbance of the night. He gathered from it that if her fear could have spoken it would have besought him to spare her, to say nothing.

His annoyance was accompanied by an inward shrug of cynical comprehension. Nothing more likely, said Garvin in his shrewdness, than that Anny should have borne a child, and that her child should be a shame and a burden to the Falshaws. They couldn't have resented it more than he did ; but he meant to wait and see the extent of the nuisance before he made his protest.

All day the inviolate stillness of his solitude was a reproach to the resentment that he felt. The child was kept quiet, smuggled away somewhere out of sight.

But that night and the next night he heard it. And no wonder. He had found that its crying came from the small garret facing his, where apparently it was locked in and left to sleep alone.

It had its trick of waking at the same hour. The crying would begin about eleven and go on till past midnight. There was no petulance in it and no anger ; it had all the qualities of a young child's cry, except the carnal dissonances and violences. The grief it uttered was too profound and too persistent, and, as it were, too pure ; it knew none of the hot-blooded throes, the strangled pauses, the lacerating resurgences of passion. At times it was shrill, unbroken, irremediable ; at times it was no more than a sad sobbing and whimpering, stifled, Garvin gathered, under the bedclothes. He lay and listened to it till he knew all its changes and inflections, its languors and wearinesses, its piteous crescendos and amazements, as of a creature malignly re-created, born again to its mysterious, immitigable suffering.

As he never slept until it had ceased, Garvin was qualified to witness to the Falshaws' abominable neglect. Nobody came near the poor little wretch to comfort it. It was probably frightened there all by itself. The mere sound of the crying wouldn't have kept him awake but for his pity for the helpless thing that made it. In the daytime he found himself thinking about it. He couldn't get away from the thought of it.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

He worried over it. He had the horrible idea that the child suffered on his account ; that the Falshaws kept it locked up in the garret in the day-time that it might be out of the lodger's way. As this theory was inconsistent with their allowing it to keep the lodger awake at night, he could only suppose that the Falshaws were as indifferent to its suffering as to his. They had more than one devil in their blood. Likely enough, it was the devil of Puritanism that made the man and woman cruel to the child of Anny's sin.

But the girl herself ?

He had the very worst opinion of the girl Anny. He was convinced that Anny, and not Mrs. Falshaw, was the mother of the child. Not that he was inclined to think hardly of the girl for having it. What he couldn't stand was her behaviour to it now that she had had it. There was nothing very intimately revealing in Anny's heavy, full-blown face ; but Garvin had judged her gross. He saw her now sinning grossly, for the sin's sake, without any grace of tenderness. She was the kind predestined to go wrong. She lacked the intelligence that might have kept her straight. He could see her going to meet her sin half-way, slowly, without any beating of the heart, finding the way by some dull instinct older than her soul.

He was obliged to admit that the poor thing had at any rate let *him* alone. Probably her instinct sufficed to tell her that he was not her prey. But he had gathered that she was responsible for the Falshaws' unwillingness to take him in ; and it was plain enough that they kept a sharp lookout on her. He knew their habits now. He knew, for instance, that Falshaw accompanied his niece on any errand undertaken after dark. Indoors they wouldn't trust her out of their sight a minute on his side of the house. Now he came to think of it, he had never once seen her there in the hours of dusk and dark ; he had never found her alone in his room at any hour. Mrs. Falshaw was always hovering somewhere near ; her forbidding eye was for ever on the poor girl as she swept and scoured.

This austerity of the Falshaws had its inconveniences for Garvin. He didn't expect a tidy room at bed-time, or hot water, or sheets invitingly turned down. But nobody seemed to think of closing the window when the evening mists came on and settled on his bed, or when the rain beat in and made it damp.

He determined to deal with Anny.

He dealt with her on the morning after his third bad night.

"Look here," he said ; "why don't you keep that child quiet ?"

Her gross colour fled. And yet she faced him.

"You've heard her, sir ?"

"Of course I've heard her."

Her thick eyes stared at him. They were curiously without shame.

"You don't look as if you had," she said.

That and her stare staggered him. Before he could answer her she had given utterance to a still more amazing thing.

"You needn't go," she said. "She won't hurt you."

With that she left him.

THE INTERCESSOR

IV

That night, his fourth, Garvin found that his nerves were growing so increasingly, so frightfully sensitive to sound that the crying seemed to come from the threshold of his door, from his bedside, from his pillow. It got from his nerves into his dreams, and he woke with the sense of a child's body pressed to his body, the palms of its hands upon his breast, its face hidden against his side, and the vibration of its sobbing above his heart. The thing passed, with a fainter, shivering, vanishing vibration which he felt as somehow external to himself.

He sat up, wideawake, and listened. The crying had ceased. His nerves were all right again.

He supposed he'd have (as Falshaw would have said) to put up with it. He could, after all, reckon on six or seven hours' good sleep, and in the daytime the poor little thing was quiet enough in all conscience. He couldn't very well resent it.

And yet he did resent it. He resented the cruelty of it. So much so that he spoke about it to Mackinnon, the doctor, whose acquaintance he had made when he was lodging up in the village. Mackinnon had called at the house in the Bottom to see how Mrs. Falshaw was getting on. Garvin lay in wait for him and asked him if he couldn't do something. He, Garvin, couldn't stand it.

The doctor was a little Highlander, red haired, fiery, and shrewd. He looked shrewdly at Garvin and told him that if he couldn't stand *that* his nerves must be in an awful state. And he took him off with him in his motor on a long round that swept the district.

That evening, Garvin, drowsed with the wind of speed, refused the solicitations of the County History and went to bed before ten.

He was in the act of undressing when he heard the child cry.

The sobbing whimper was no longer stifled under bed-clothes; it sounded distinctly from the open landing. Garvin unlatched his door and looked out.

At this hour of the newly risen moon there was light on the landing like a grey day. He saw a girl child standing on the garret stair. It had on a short nightgown that showed its naked feet. It was clinging to the rail with one hand.

Its face was so small, so shrunken and so bleached, that at first its actual features were indistinct to him. What *was* distinct, appallingly distinct, was the look it had; a look not to be imagined or defined, and thinkable only as a cry, an agony, made visible.

The child stood there long enough to fix on him its look. At the same time it seemed so withdrawn in the secret of its suffering as to be unaware of him.

It descended the stair, went close past him, and crossed the landing to the women's room.

Now on these hot August nights the door was left half-open, leaving a wide passage way into the room. Garvin could see it. He looked for

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

the child to go in where its mother lay. Instead of going in it stood there motionless as if it kept watch.

Then all at once it began crying, crying and beating on the open door with its tenuous hands, beating and pushing as against a door closed and locked.

It was then that Garvin knew.

The creature gave up its efforts at last and turned from the door sobbing. Garvin could not see its face now, for it had raised its arms and held them across its forehead with the backs of the hands pressed against its weeping eyes. Thus blinded, it made its way across the landing towards Garvin's door, and passed by him, still unaware, into his room.

He went in and shut-to the door. The child was standing by the foot of the bed as if it watched somebody who slept there. It stayed, watching, while Garvin undressed and got into bed. Then—Garvin was not frightened nor even surprised at what happened then; he seemed to have expected it—the little creature climbed up the bedside and crept in beside him. He felt, flesh to flesh, its body pressed to his body, the palms of its hands upon his breast, and its face hidden against his side.

V

He knew now what he was in for; he knew what was the matter with house; he knew its secret, the source of what, so far as *he* went, he could only call its fascination. For he could swear to his own state of mind—he was *not* afraid.

On one point only he was uncertain. He did not yet know whether he were alone or not in his experience, whether the Falshaws knew what he knew, and whether it was the things that they knew, that they had heard and seen, their experiences, which accounted for their abiding gloom. Neither they nor anybody else had told him precisely what he would be in for if he insisted on staying at Falshaw's; but there had been (he remembered now) a rather sinister inflection laid on certain words that had been said to him.

They came back to him now. He could have very little doubt that the place had a sinister reputation, and that the Falshaws knew it. He had not understood it at the time, because his mind had been so misled by Falshaw's bodily grossness that it could only form a gross conception of the trouble of the house, of the things that, as they had intimated to him, had happened there. Poor Garvin profoundly repented the infamy of some of his suspicions, those relating to the girl Anny.

He found on the morning of his experience that Falshaw's attitude, like his own, had changed somewhat overnight. The gross man was still suspicious (like Garvin), but there was more solicitude than hostility in his suspicion. He watched Garvin as if he thought he were going to be ill, as if he knew and were on the look out for the symptoms of his malady.

Ill or not (he certainly felt all right), Garvin was an object of even greater interest to his friend Mackinnon. The doctor called that evening with the evident intention of cheering him up. Garvin felt that Mackinnon was on the look out for something too. They talked about the

THE INTERCESSOR

County History and Garvin's part in it, which Mackinnon plainly regarded as conferring lustre upon Garvin. Incidentally he put him in the way of much valuable information, for the doctor knew something (sometimes he knew a great deal) about each house and its family within thirty miles round.

In the pauses of the conversation they could hear Falshaw talking to his wife. The two were sitting up late, and he seemed to be arguing with her.

It was eleven o'clock before Mackinnon went. The clank of the gate behind him was instantly followed by the sound of Mrs. Falshaw's chair scraping on the stone flags of the kitchen and by Falshaw's fist knocking upon Garvin's door.

He was almost respectful as he stood looming before Garvin's writing-table.

"Mr. Garvin," he began, "ah've soommat to saay to you. If you doan't loike what you've found you'd better goa. There's noa call for you to give th' 'ouse a bod naame. There's too mooch been saaid. Ah'm dommed if ah'll put oop with it."

"I know the worst," said Garvin quietly, "and I can put up with it. How do you know what your next lodger 'll do—or say?"

Falshaw's huge bulk seemed to sway there as he placed his balled fists on the table for support. He was silent.

"Mr. Falshaw, I don't know how much you know, or what—but if it happens to be what I know——"

"Ah doan't saay as 'tish't. What ah saay is that there's noa call for you to stomach it. You can goa."

"I don't want to go. Why should I?"

"You doan't?" He peered at him.

"Of course not."

"Then, sir" (it was the first time that Falshaw had called him "sir"), "you bean't afeard?"

"No more, Mr. Falshaw, then you are yourself."

"Ah've noa cause to be afeard. Ah knaw nothing."

A tremor passed through him as from some centre stirred by utterance. His face quivered. Its brute heaviness was redeemed for a moment by some inscrutable pathos. It was impossible to say whether Falshaw deplored his ignorance or repudiated knowledge.

On the whole, Garvin inclined to think that he *was* alone in his experience.

VI

Three days passed. Night after night Garvin witnessed the same supernatural event.

His senses were now so perfectly adjusted to his experience that he no longer thought of it as supernatural. What struck him as marvellous was the change it worked in the Falshaws now that they knew he had it. He was evidently set apart, consecrated by his experience. He had become for them an object of extraordinary respect—he would almost have said

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

of affection. Whereas they had once disregarded his wishes and treated his little likings and dislikings with an almost insolent contempt, now, everything that he had ever asked for, that he had ever wanted without asking for, was remembered and provided. The fresh home-made bread that he had coveted appeared daily at his table; his meals had a savour and variety which he would have judged beyond the scope of Mrs. Falshaw's art. He could hardly suppose that they did it for the sake of gain; for, poor as they were, they had taken him in under protest and had made no effort to keep him until now.

This change from hostility to the extreme of friendliness dated from the evening when he had declared to Falshaw that he felt no fear.

The statement (he had to own it) required qualification. It was true enough that he felt no fear of the primal, the complete manifestation. That, having all the colours and appearances of flesh and blood, had the value, the assurance, almost the inevitability of a natural thing. It had parted with its horror from the moment when he perceived that it was responsive to his pity and accessible to his succour.

But Garvin, reviewing his experiences, distinguished between the perfect and the imperfect. Beyond the primal haunting, round and about the central figure, the completed vision, he was conscious of a borderland of fear into which he had not yet entered.

It was chiefly present to him as a disagreeable feeling he had about his bedroom—a feeling which little Garvin, as he valued his own manliness, sternly refused to attend to. Still it was there. But for that sense he had, he would have preferred his garret to the long eastern chambers looking on the orchard of dead trees. The branches that hung before his window were alive. At sunset the light ran through their leaves, kindling them to a divine translucent green. And yet he loathed it.

The room had, clearly, some profound significance for the child, since it was always compelled to come there. But the significance was something that Garvin didn't care to explore; he felt it to be part of the peculiar, foggy unpleasantness of the borderland.

It was strange that, while he knew no terror of the perfect apparition, the bedfellow, his fear of the borderland was growing on him. His feeling was that if the things that were *there* became visible they would be more than he could endure.

There were degrees in the clearness of the primal manifestation; degrees which, as he made it out, corresponded to the intensity of the emotion, the suffering behind it. The child's form gathered and lost substance. At times it was of an extreme tenuity, suggesting nothing tangible. At times it had, not only the colour, but the pressure of flesh and blood. At times its face, its hands, and little naked feet had the peculiar vivid whiteness of white skin seen under water. Its feet along the floor were like feet moving through water.

He saw it now by day as well as night. It would pass him in the passage, on the stairs. It lay in wait for him at his door or at its own. He had an idea that it spent hours playing in the backyard under the ash-trees. Once when he looked out of his window he could have sworn

THE INTERCESSOR

that he saw it hanging over the great stone water-tank that stood there at the corner of the wall. He had never once seen it in his sitting-room, and what went on in the Falshaws' kitchen he could not say.

Thrice he saw it in the garden, coming towards him from the back-yard and going to a corner under the orchard wall. As it passed under the trees he could see the grass growing through its feet. It carried in its hand a little cup of water which it emptied there in the corner. It was busy and absorbed, very earnestly and seriously bent upon this act. He noticed that always, out of doors, the appearance was imperfect, but he discerned dimly that, out of doors, it had a happy look.

He examined the corner that it visited. A long flat-faced stone stood upright in the wall there; below it, hidden by the grass, he found a small plot marked out with stones.

A child's garden ruined beyond remembrance. There were gaps in its borders where the stones had been upheaved or buried. In the middle, trampled and beaten into the earth, he came upon the fragments of a broken cup.

It was thus that he began to construct the child's history. He had found that its more complete manifestations occurred indoors, on the landing and after dark, and that they culminated in bodily contact, the pressure of its form—the bedfellow's—against his own. And so he argued that outside, in the open air, it had been happy. It was within the house that the suffering which was its life had come to pass; the suffering was somehow connected with the closing of Mrs. Falshaw's door; it was habitually intenser at night-time, and it had its unspeakable climax, its agony, in Garvin's room.

On all these points he was certain with an absolute and immutable certainty. What baffled him was their date. Things had happened. He had more than a sense, an intolerable sense, of their happening. But *when* had they happened? To which one of the four generations that the house had known?

He thought he could tell if he could only get into the room where, as far as he could make it out, the whole thing started, the garret opposite his own with the stair before its door. It was the child's room and was bound to contain some sign or trace of the child. He must contrive to get in somehow.

He found a pretext. The parlour was still lumbered with the packing-cases his books had travelled in (Garvin had bruised his shins over them more than once). He approached Falshaw and asked him if he might not store the packing-cases in that box-room that they had upstairs. He supposed it was a box-room.

Falshaw hesitated. His gloom deepened. Presently, with some visible perturbation, he replied. Mr. Garvin might do as he liked. He would give him the key of the room. Mr. Garvin would be so good as to put the packing-cases in the space behind the door, without—Falshaw's trouble grew on him—disarranging anything.

He carried the cases upstairs and left them on the landing after giving

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

Garvin the key of the room. It was evident that nothing would induce him to go in there himself.

Garvin's heart beat thickly as he entered. The room—he could see at a glance—was not used as a box-room. It was not used now for anything at all. It was a long garret, narrowed excessively by the sloping roof, and bare of all furniture but a chest of drawers and a washstand near the window, and, drawn to the far end of the room against the wall, two objects, each covered with a white sheet.

Garvin drew back the sheets. Thrust away, hidden out of sight, shrouded like the dead, were a child's little chair and a child's cot. He could see the slender hollow in the mattress where its body had lain.

He raised the edge of the coarse blue and white counterpane. The pillow beneath was not soiled, neither was it freshly clean. There was a small round patch, slightly discoloured, slightly dented, by the pressure of a child's head.

For a moment that brought the thing horribly near to him.

He felt the hollows with his hand and found that they were hard. His reason told him that it must have taken more than one generation to make them so. He was, therefore, no surer of his date. The room had given him an uncomfortable sensation, and that was all.

That evening, setting out for his walk, he met Falshaw in the path coming over the brow of the hill. They exchanged a greeting and some remarks about the weather. There was a wind on the hill, and Falshaw advised Garvin not to go far. It was beating up, he said, for rain.

Garvin turned and walked back with him towards the lane. A sudden impulse seized him to make Falshaw talk. They stopped at the rise where the naked plum-tree pointed to the house in the Bottom.

"That's not an old house for these parts, Falshaw. How long have you had it?"

"Ever since ah can remember. Ma faather had it before me, and 'is faather before 'im agen."

"Four generations, then?"

"Three, sir." He added, "There'll be four soon enough if all goes well."

It was his first open reference to his wife's state.

"Why shouldn't all go well?"

"Thot's what I tell the missus. But ah can't move 'er. She's got it into 'er 'ead thot thick," said Falshaw gloomily.

Garvin murmured something vaguely consoling; and all the time his mind was running on his date. He must make Falshaw give it him.

"You see, Mr. Garvin, she's bin, you may say, in a dark state ever since——"

He stopped. Speech was painful and difficult to him.

"Ever since?" For a moment Garvin felt that Falshaw might be giving him the date.

But if Falshaw had hovered on the verge of a confidence he now drew back. All he said was, "It's more soometimes than ah can put oop with."

THE INTERCESSOR

He meditated.

"And t' doctor, e cooms to cheer 'er oop, but 'e can't *do* nowt."

"What does he think?" asked Garvin, recalled to sympathy by the man's misery.

"Think? 'E doan't think. 'E saays it's natch'ral to 'er condition. But—ah doan't remember——"

He stopped again, and fell into the gloom that Garvin recognised as the shadow of his wife's dark state.

"It's a bod job, Mr. Garvin, it's a bod job."

"I wonder," said Garvin, "if I ought to stay much longer. She may be doing too much. Honestly, hadn't I better go?"

Falshaw shook his head.

"Doan't you think thot, sir; doan't you think thot."

"I can't bear," Garvin went on, "to be giving trouble at a time like this."

"Trooble? You call *thot* trooble?"

"Well——"

"You'll bring trooble, Mr. Garvin, if you goa."

"I don't understand."

"And ah doan't understond it neither. But—if you *can* stop, Mr. Garvin, doan't you goa. Doan't you goa."

He paused.

"If she sees you con stond it, maybe she'll mak out thot things can't be so bod."

Things? It was vague; but when it came to the point, to Garvin's point, Falshaw *was* vague. Garvin felt that they were on the verge again. He was determined to find out how much Falshaw knew, or how much he didn't know. He would tackle him there and then. He would tackle him suddenly and straight.

"Things can't be so bad if I can stand them?" he questioned. "And how bad do you think they are yourself, Falshaw?"

"Ah doan't think. And ah *knew* nobbut what ah've heard. What you've heard." (He glossed it further.) "What folks saay."

"And these things—that they say, how long have they been said?"

Falshaw winced. "Ah doan't know."

There was no doubt that Falshaw repudiated any personal knowledge of the things; but then, Garvin reflected, he might be lying. He pressed it home.

"Before your time?"

"Noa. Not afore *ma* time. Thot couldn't be."

He said it simply and uncontrollably, as if it had been wrung from him, not by Garvin but by the pressure of some suffering of his own. He was profoundly unaware of having given Garvin what he wanted.

"You know *that*," said Garvin, who was for the moment insensible to pity in the excitement of following his trail.

Falshaw rallied. "Ah *knew* nothing, ah tell you, but what ah've heard. Nothing but what *you've* heard, Mr. Garvin."

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

They had come to the stone stile that led into the lane. They stood there facing each other.

"It's not what I've heard," said Garvin. "It's what I've seen."

At that Falshaw turned from him and bowed himself upon the stone wall.

VII

Up till that moment Garvin had barely hinted at the nature of his experiences. He was aware that his previous intimations had given Falshaw some uncomfortable emotions; but he was not prepared for the violence of the passion with which his final revelation was received.

He couldn't leave the man there in his agony; neither could he touch him nor speak to him. A certain awe restrained him in the presence of a feeling so tremendous and inscrutable.

It was Falshaw who recovered first, pulling his huge bulk together and steadying himself to speak. It was as if under it all he had not forgotten the consideration due to Garvin, who had become so inexplicably the witness and partaker of his tragedy.

"Mr. Garvin," he said, "ah think ah knaw what you may have seen. And ah tell you you've noa call to be afeard. It woan't harm you."

It was what Anny had told him.

"I know," he said, "it won't harm me."

"It wouldn't," Falshaw went on. "There's a soort o' pity in they things."

He paused, feeling for his words.

"They knaw; and they doan't coom to those that are afeard of 'em. They doan't coom so as to be seen."

He paused again, meditating, and fell back upon his phrase, "It's the pity in them."

He climbed the stone stile and went slowly towards his house.

Garvin turned and walked again to the brow of the hill. There he stopped and looked back. Above the stone wall of the orchard, in the corner of the child's garden, he saw Falshaw standing, with his head bowed to his breast.

He said to himself then that he might have known. The child's garden under the orchard grass—*that* belonged clearly to the Falshaws' time. Why—as grass grows—within fifteen, within ten years it would have been buried, grassed over, without a stone to show that it had ever been. It belonged, not to Falshaw's father's generation, nor yet to Falshaw's, but to the generation that his wife bore in her womb.

VIII

The wild plum-tree on the hill rocked in the south-west wind, and pointed, gesticulated at the house.

Garvin's gaze followed the network of stone walls flung over the country. He had a sense of the foregone of the things he saw. He

THE INTERCESSOR

saw the network as a system of lines that, wherever you picked it up and followed it, led in some predestined way to the house as its secret and its centre. You couldn't get away from the house.

It was in an effort to get away from it that he walked on towards the fells.

The wind, as Falshaw had warned him, was beating up for rain. The south-west was black with rain. He could see it scudding up over the shoulder of the fell.

Half-way he turned and was blown home before the storm, leaning backwards, supporting himself on the wind. A mile from the Bottom the rain caught him and soaked him through.

Falshaw and Anny stood at the door of the house, watching for him. They were troubled at his drenching. He changed, and threw his dripping clothes down over the stairhead to be dried in the kitchen. He knew that neither Falshaw nor Anny had the nerve to go to his room to fetch them. He was glad to get out of it himself.

Mrs. Falshaw had his supper keeping hot for him by the kitchen hearth. She proposed that he should sit and eat it there while the fire was being lit in the parlour. He had owned to a chilliness.

She had set the lamp on the supper table, and sat in the ring of twilight with darkness behind her. Portions of her face and body thus appeared superficially illuminated, while the bulk of her became part of the darkness. Garvin was deeply aware of her face and of her eyes, which were fixed on him with an intolerable hunger. The face was sombre and sallow; it was hewn with a hard, unrounded heaviness, unlike her husband's. It would have been deadly hard but for the fugitive, hunted look that gave it a sort of painful life in deadness. Whether she sat or stood she was a creature overtaken, fixed in her fear, with no possibility of escape.

There were moments when he thought that she was about to speak, to ask him what he had seen. He felt somehow that she knew. She knew he had seen something. Whatever Mackinnon thought, he, Garvin, knew, and her husband knew, that she suffered no bodily ailment. What weighed on her was her sense of the supernatural, and her fear of it and of its inscrutable work on her, penetrating her flesh and striking the child that was to be born. It had been already brought home to him that his value, his fascination for her lay in his shared sense of it. That was the secret that they kept between them.

It was terrible to have to sit in that tongue-tied communion, and eat, bearing his own knowledge and her sense of it. He was glad when it was over and he was safe in the parlour, a place which he felt to be immune from these influences.

Anny was in there, on her knees by the hearth, trying to coax the fire to draw up the damp chimney. His impulse urged him to talk to Anny as he had talked to Falshaw. He was at that stage when he had to talk to somebody; and he wanted to know how much Anny knew.

"Anny," he said, "my bed's damp; why didn't you go up and shut the window?" He knew why.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

She rose and stood before him, awkwardly wiping her hands on her rough apron.

"Because I'm afeard, sir."

He looked at Anny. She was coarsely made as to the body, but to his purified perception there seemed to flow from her an almost radiant innocence and probity.

"What are you afraid of?"

She glanced aside miserably.

"You know what."

"Yes, I know. But you told me yourself it wouldn't hurt me."

"Hurt you? Little Affy——"

It had a name then, but he hadn't caught it.

"Little——"

"Little Affy."

"Effy," he murmured.

"Yes, sir. Little Affy never 'urt anyone in her life."

He said it over to himself. It touched him even more than Falshaw's "There's a sort of pity in they things." It brought the child nearer to him, poignantly near, in tender flesh and blood. He felt the sting of an intolerable evocation.

It was not yet complete.

"Who *was* little Effy?"

The girl's eyelids flickered and reddened and filled with tears.

"I mustn't talk about her, sir."

"Why not?"

"I promised Ooncle."

"It doesn't matter, does it, as long as I'm not afraid?"

"You're *not* afraid, sir" (she whispered it), "to sleep with her?"

"No, Anny, I'm not afraid."

The girl said "Good night" as if she had said "God bless you," and left him to his thought.

Whatever Anny had or hadn't seen, she *knew*.

He could not doubt that he was alone in his complete experience, yet he would have said that if ever there was a man and a woman and a girl that were haunted, it was Falshaw and his wife and the girl Anny. He could only suppose that their haunting was vague and imperfect. They lived on the edge of the borderland of fear, discovering nothing clearly yet knowing all. Anny, at any rate, knew the worst.

For he always put it to himself that it *was* the worst, even while he felt in his flesh the horror of the borderland, his own borderland, beyond.

It was on him that night, though he tried to fortify himself by reiterating that he knew the worst, and that if his nerves could stand that they could stand anything. He was not afraid (as Anny had suggested) to sleep as he had slept; he was not afraid of his bedfellow. He was afraid of his room, and of his bed, of the white sheets and the coarse quilt, of the whole twilight bulk of it, waiting for him in the corner by the window wall.

His sense of terror had defined itself as a sense of evil surpassing the

THE INTERCESSOR

fear of the supernatural. It was borne in on him that some iniquitous thing had had its place in this house and in this room.

He lay awake there, listening to the sounds of the night ; to the wind sweeping the ash boughs along the roof above his window ; to the drip of the rain in the stone trough beneath. The sounds of the night comforted him ; and, before long, his brain became fogged with a grey stupor. But the stupor was like a veil spread over some backward, bottomless pit of fear. Tenuous itself, intangible, it yet held him, perilously it held him, breaking, delaying, lengthening out, moment by moment, his imminent descent.

The air in the close garret oppressed him to suffocation. He got up and opened the window. The wind and the rain had passed, the ash-trees were still ; a clear light, grey as water, filled the room. Things showed in it solid and distinct. Something seemed to shift in Garvin's brain with the sudden shifting of his body, and, as he stood there at the foot of the bed, he was aware of something happening before him.

He couldn't say what it was that happened. He only knew that it was bound to happen ; it had been foreshadowed by his fear. He knew what that sudden shifting in his brain meant. He had simply gone over the borderland of fear and was in the gripping centre.

There were two there, a man and a woman. He did not discern them as ordinary supernatural presences ; the terror they evoked surpassed all fear of the intangible. Of one thing he was certain—the man was Falshaw. He could swear to that. The woman he had with him was a woman whom Garvin had never seen. He couldn't say what it was he saw, what was done by those two, but he knew that it was evil. He couldn't say whether he really saw it, or whether he apprehended it by some supreme sense more living and more horrible than sight. It was monstrous, unintelligible ; it lay outside the order of his experience. He seemed, in this shifting of his brain, to have parted with his experience, to have become a creature of vague memory and appalling possibilities of fear. He had told the truth when he had said that he was not afraid. Until this moment he had never known what fear was. The feeling was unspeakable. Its force, its vividness was such as could be possible only to a mind that came virgin to horror.

The whole thing lasted for a second or so. When it passed and the two with it, Garvin turned and saw the child, in its nightgown and with its naked feet, standing in the middle of the room and staring at the bed as he had stared. The fear on its face was more terrible to Garvin than his own fear. If it *was* his own.

He turned sick and knew nothing. He supposed he must have fainted.

IX

The next day Garvin said to himself that he would see Mackinnon. His nerves had gone to pieces for the time being, and he would have to get Mackinnon to patch them up. He found himself clinging to the thought of Mackinnon.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

He spent the morning and afternoon out of doors, as far from Falshaw's as his legs would carry him; and in the evening he went to see Mackinnon.

The doctor was out, and Garvin waited. He hadn't the pluck to go back to Falshaw's without seeing Mackinnon.

By the time Mackinnon appeared (late for dinner) Garvin knew that he hadn't really come there to consult him. He had come to talk to him, to make him tell him what he knew about the Falshaws. He couldn't think why on earth he hadn't done it before; but he supposed Mackinnon must have put him off by the stupid things he had said about his nerves. He didn't mean to be put off to-night, and he wasn't going to talk about his nerves.

Neither was Mackinnon. He only looked at Garvin and said it was odd his being there; for he had just gone round to Falshaw's to see Garvin and bring him back to dine.

They dined alone together (Mackinnon was a bachelor); but it was afterwards in his den, over the cigarettes and whisky, that they talked.

"I say," said Garvin, who began it, "do you know anything about those Falshaws?"

"Oh, as much as I know about most people," said Mackinnon.

"Do you know what's the matter with them?"

"Would you expect me to own it if I didn't?"

"You know as well as I do that there's something wrong with them."

"There's something wrong with Mrs. Falshaw. Melancholy. They get it. She's had it ever since."

"Ever since what? That's what I want to know."

Mackinnon shrugged. "Ever since she began to be——"

"You think *that* accounts for it?"

"Presumably."

"Well—but how about Falshaw? And how about the girl Anny? And if it comes to that—how about *me*?"

"You? I suppose you've been hearing some queer stories. There *are* queer stories."

"I haven't heard one of them," said Garvin.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Positive."

"What *have* you heard, then?"

"I told you the other day."

"Yes," said Mackinnon; "that's one of the stories."

"How do you account for them?"

"The stories?"

"Yes."

"The facts account for the stories right enough."

"You mean they've been fabricated after the fact?"

"That's what happens."

"You forget," said Garvin, "that I haven't heard the stories and that I don't yet know the facts."

THE INTERCESSOR

"I can give you them if you want them. They're quite as queer as the stories, and more interesting, because more human."

"I think," said Garvin, "you'd better hear *my* story first."

"Haven't I heard it?"

"Not my latest. Do you want it?"

"Well, I'd like to see if it's different from other people's. You know they all say they've *heard* things."

"Do they say they've seen them?"

"No. None of them seem to have gone as far as that."

"Well, I've gone as far as that—farther."

He told Mackinnon as casually as he could what he had seen.

Mackinnon was inclined to be impatient. "Yes, yes—a child that cries—in a nightgown—of course. But can you describe her? Can you give me any details?"

"She was very small; she had short hair—bleached—and pale eyes. The flesh under her eyes was sunken. Two little pits—just here. Her face was sallow white and drawn a little, by her nostrils——"

"Queer," murmured Mackinnon, "very queer."

Garvin went on till Mackinnon interrupted him again.

"Beating on the door? Which door?"

"The door of Mrs. Falshaw's room."

"All right. Go on."

Garvin went on, to the scene in the orchard. "And I've seen it hanging over that stone tank at the back."

"Good God!" said Mackinnon softly.

Garvin came to his last experience.

"There," he said, "I own I am a bit vague."

"You're certain you saw a man and a woman?"

"Yes. And I'm certain that the man was Falshaw. But the woman I know nothing about. It wasn't Mrs. Falshaw."

"No," said Mackinnon thoughtfully. "Can you describe her?"

"I couldn't see her very well. Falshaw was between us. She was big and young and—that part of it's beastly."

He stopped.

"And the beastliest thing about it is that I didn't understand it, Mackinnon, I didn't understand it—and, frankly, I was in an awful funk."

Mackinnon stared. "You didn't understand it?"

"I'm only talking about what I felt at the time. I'm explaining what made it so horrible. I seemed to have parted with my power of understanding—a whole tract of knowledge—clean gone——"

Mackinnon was silent.

"What room were you in?" he asked presently.

"The small room at the back."

"I know." The doctor shifted his position as if he were trying to shake off something.

"Well," he said, "that yarn of yours would be queer enough if you

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

knew the facts. As it is, I don't mind telling you that it's the queerest yarn I've heard yet."

"Can you account for it?"

"My dear Garvin, you can't live up here, in this country and with these people, and still go about accounting for things. If you're a wise man you accept them."

"You accept my statements then?"

"I have to. They square with the facts. Did you say anything to the Falshaws?"

"A little—to him—and Anny. I can't tell how much they know. They wouldn't say."

"Anny wouldn't?"

"She let out that the child's name was Effy; and then she told me she'd promised Falshaw not to talk about her."

"She isn't allowed to talk about her—because she—*knows*. She didn't tell you that Effy was the Falshaws' child?"

"No."

"She was. Their only child. She died three years ago."

"How?"

"Drowned. In the stone tank under your window."

"She fell in," said Garvin dreamily.

"She fell in. There was nobody about. She must have had some sort of fit, or she could have got out all right."

"Who found her?"

"The woman you saw."

Garvin winced.

"The Falshaws were severely censured at the inquest. You see, the child oughtn't to have been left alone. She'd had one fit about a month before and they knew it."

"And before that?"

"Can't say. Nobody knew. They weren't likely to know. The child was left by herself night and day."

"I see. That's what's the matter with them."

"No doubt it's what's given Sarah Falshaw this idea of hers that the baby will be born dead. Shouldn't wonder if it was. Good thing, too, when you think how she made the other one suffer."

Mackinnon's fire broke out. "Women like that oughtn't to bear children. But they do. They always will do."

"She wants it to live?"

"I can't tell you what she wants—now."

"She didn't want—the other one?"

"Oh, she wanted her well enough. But she wanted something else more. And she had to want. She'd been all right to the child until she found that out; and then she couldn't bear the sight of it."

"She wanted another man, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it. She wanted her own husband. It isn't a pretty story to tell, Garvin."

THE INTERCESSOR

X

All the same he told it.

"I'd say she was like an animal, only animals don't carry the thing to the point of insanity. And animals—most of them, at any rate—aren't cruel to their young."

"What did she do to it?"

"She did nothing. That was it. She used to say it was Falshaw's fault that she didn't care for it. Everything, you see, was Falshaw's fault. But she behaved as if it was the child's fault that Falshaw didn't want her. You'd have said she had a grudge against it. Things certainly got worse after it came. But she'd led him a life before that. Lord, what a life a woman *can* lead a man when she wants him more than he wants her and he lets her know it.

"They'd been all right at first. You wouldn't think it, but Sarah was a fine-looking woman when he married her—one of those hard black and white women who turn yellow when they worry. And Sarah was the sort that worried. She worried the life out of Falshaw. He was a big, strong, full-blooded fellow with a lot of exuberant young animality about him, and look at him now; what aged man do you suppose he is? Fifty, wouldn't you? Well, if you'll believe it, he's only thirty-eight. That's Sarah.

"He was twenty-three when he married her, and Sarah may have been a bit older. And they'd been married five years before the child came. He wasn't a bad sort, Falshaw, and he rubbed along with Sarah and her tongue and her temper for three years or so. He used to say she didn't mean it, and she couldn't help it, and she'd be all right when there was a youngster or two about. I suppose he thought all women were like that when they hadn't any children. The worst of it was she knew he thought it, and it riled her.

"Many a man would have tried to knock it out of her with a stout ash stick, but Falshaw wasn't that sort. He chuckled and grinned at her and reckoned secretly on the baby. And there's something exquisitely irritating, to a woman of Sarah's temperament, in a man who chuckles and grins and reckons on a baby that doesn't come. And long before it came she'd tired him out, and he took up with another woman, a bad lot.

"That was a temporary lapse. Falshaw's heart wasn't in it. And, though I don't suppose Sarah forgave him, she got over it. But she never got over Rhoda Webster.

"Rhoda was a servant girl at the White Hart Inn. I don't blame Falshaw, mind you. When I think what his life was, I'm glad he had that one bright spot of immorality to look back upon. He'd got into the way of going off to the White Hart—a good two miles—to get out of the range of his wife's tongue, and Rhoda wasn't by any means a bad girl—then. She was neither good nor bad; she was just natural, without a bit of art to help her one way or the other. Anyhow, there was so little harm in the girl—then—or in Falshaw for that matter, that nothing happened till he had her in his house after Sarah's child was born. Sarah was laid up for months—that's how it took her—and the man was at his

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

wits' end. Rhoda got restless and left her place, and was always in and out of Falshaw's house looking after Falshaw. She'd walk the two miles from the village and back just to cook his dinner and see him eat it. And when Sarah got about again she wasn't fit for much, and she had to mind the baby. So Falshaw kept on having the girl about the house. He said he had to have someone.

"That went on for months and months. It looked innocent enough ; but Sarah began to suspect things. They had a row about it. Sarah said the girl was to go, and Falshaw said she was to stay, and if Sarah didn't like it she could lump it.

"It ended in the girl staying altogether. She slept in the house. Then Sarah found them out. And this time it broke her nerve. If she'd been a woman of any spirit she'd have left him. But she wasn't that sort. The feeling she had for Falshaw wouldn't let her leave him. She had to stay. She wasn't going to leave him to the other woman, and the other woman wasn't going to leave him to her. So there they were all three, shut up in that house, Falshaw carrying on with Rhoda behind his wife's back, and his wife stalking them, and seeing everything and pretending half the time she didn't see. And Rhoda, if you please, amiable, imperturbable, scouring and scrubbing, and behaving as if it didn't matter to her whether Falshaw carried on with her or not. She always had that air of not knowing what Sarah saw to worry about.

"At first, I believe, Falshaw made a great point of not leaving Sarah. But one night he never came near her. And then Sarah turned. The next night was a wet one, and she waited till Rhoda was in the back-yard or somewhere, and she locked her out. Up till then Falshaw had chuckled and grinned and gone his own way, reckoning on the child that had come to keep things straight. He excused himself for everything by saying Sarah'd got the child.

"But when he came home that night and found Rhoda standing on the front doorstep in the rain, he went for Sarah there and then and told her that if she did anything more to the girl he'd go out of the house—he and Rhoda—and leave her, as he put it, for good and all. He was sick of her. It was her own doing. She'd driven him to it. It had got to be, and she'd have to 'put oop with it.' Can't you hear him saying it ? He hammered it in. She'd got the child. He'd given her the child ; and it ought to be enough for her.

"Up till then she might have had some hope of getting him back, but when he began to talk about the child she knew it was the end. And she blamed the child for it. If the child hadn't been born Falshaw's girl would never have got her foot into the house. If the child hadn't been born she'd have had her strength, she could have turned the girl out and made her stay out. If the child hadn't been born she'd have kept her good looks and had a hold on Falshaw.

"Which," said Mackinnon, "was all perfectly true."

"How old was the child then ?" Garvin asked.

"Let me think. It must have been about three."

"It was older than that when I saw it," said Garvin.

THE INTERCESSOR

"Up till then it hadn't suffered," said Mackinnon. "Sarah had been quite decent to it. But when she realised that she'd got it instead of her husband she couldn't bear it near her.

"The first thing she did was to turn it out of the bed where it used to sleep with her. They say she couldn't stand the touch of its body against hers. You see that was how she took it. You may think I'm unjust to the woman—Heaven knows she suffered—but if you'd seen her with that child and how it suffered—I've seen passion, animal passion, in unpleasant forms than you can imagine, and I've seen some very ugly results of its frustration; but that woman showed me the ugliest thing on God's earth—the hard, savage lust that avenges its frustration on its own offspring. If she couldn't have Falshaw with her she wouldn't have the child. That was her attitude.

"When it was older she turned it out of her room—that long room in the front. It had to sleep by itself in some place at the back——"

"I know," said Garvin.

"Not that Sarah was actively or deliberately cruel. It was well-fed and all that. But it loved its mother—and it knew. My God—how she *could*! I've seen the child making love to that woman—making love, Garvin, with its little face and its funny voice and its fingers—stroking her; and if she didn't push it away, she'd sit and take no notice of it. But it went on.

"I've seen that; and I've seen Rhoda kiss it and give it things when its mother wasn't looking. Rhoda was always good to it. But it would go from Rhoda to its mother any day.

"That was when it was little. She'd suckled it, you see, before she took a grudge against it.

"At last she took to locking her door against it. Once Rhoda found it beating on the door and crying the house down, and she took it into her own bed.

"Rhoda slept in the servant's room, the room you have now.

"All this came out at the inquest, mind you, when Rhoda gave evidence. Lots of things came out. It seems that when Falshaw was annoyed with his wife or she with Falshaw, she vented her annoyance on the child. She found out that was the way to hurt him. For instance, Falshaw had dug a little garden for it at the bottom of the orchard. And it made the child happy. She used to go running backwards and forwards from the stone tank to the garden, watering it from a little cup that Rhoda gave her. Rhoda and Falshaw used to play with her there. One day Mrs. Falshaw found them at it. And she took the cup from the child and broke it to pieces in a fury, and stamped on the garden till she'd destroyed it. Just because Falshaw made it. Rhoda took the child into the house so that it mightn't see what its mother was doing. She got that in at the inquest, too. But she shielded Falshaw so well, and made the case so black against his wife, that it was considered to damage her evidence.

"And here's where you come in. When the child couldn't get into its mother's room it used to go across to Rhoda's, and creep into her bed

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

and cuddle up to her for warmth. It was always cold. It fretted, you see, and though it was well-fed its food didn't do it any good. I was always being called in. Once I spoke my mind to Sarah Falshaw, and she told me I didn't know what I was talking about.

"Then, one night, it went into Rhoda's room and found Falshaw there.

"And I'm inclined to think, Garvin, that you saw what it saw. For Falshaw turned round and cursed it. Heaven knows how much it understood. Falshaw may have frightened it. Anyhow, it had some kind of fit—the first, I believe, it ever did have.

"After that it was afraid of Falshaw and of Rhoda, though it had been very fond of both of them. Oddly, enough, it never was afraid of its mother. Account for *that* if you can."

"What happened," said Garvin, who didn't attempt to account for it, "when Effy died?"

"Falshaw sent Rhoda away, wouldn't have anything more to do with her. His wife blamed them both for the child's death, and Falshaw blamed himself. It sobered him. He's been a good husband to that woman ever since.

"It's queer, Garvin—but in one way it hasn't changed him. He still reckons on the child, the child that Mrs. Falshaw insists will be born dead. It may be. But it's far more probable——"

"What is?"

"That Sarah Falshaw will go off her head. That," said Mackinnon, "is what *I'm* waiting for."

They were silent a long time till Garvin spoke.

"But, Mackinnon, what do you make of it? Of my seeing these things? It's a series of hallucinations, if you like. But a series, and it all tallies. On your own showing it all tallies."

"It does."

"What I can't get at is *why* it tallies—what makes me see?"

Mackinnon brooded, while Garvin excitedly went on.

"Is it, do you suppose, suggestion? Or some influence given off by these people—by their evil consciences?"

"Or," said Mackinnon gravely—"their evil."

XI

It was morning. Garvin was sitting in the field under the plum-tree, staring at the house in the Bottom, the house that seemed to stand always in the twilight, to gather upon its walls a perpetual dusk.

It knew no sun, only degrees of twilight, dark and clear. Yesterday under a grey sky it had been drenched in gloom. To-day, when the south was golden white with the sun, when the hot air quivered like water over the grass tops in the field, the house stood as if withdrawn into its own grey, sub-lucid evening, intolerably secret, intolerably remote.

And now he knew its secret. "Their evil" saturating the very

THE INTERCESSOR

walls, leaking through and penetrating those other walls, the bounds of Garvin's personality, starting in him a whole train of experience not his own.

Their evil. It had been for Mackinnon an immense admission. It went beyond all accepted theories of suggestion; and considering what Mackinnon's information was compared with his, Garvin couldn't see that he could very well have gone further. The doctor had watched the outside of events; whereas he, Garvin, had been taken into the invisible places, into the mystic heart of suffering. He knew the unnamed, unnameable secret of pity and fear.

These things had become the substance of his innermost self.

His knowledge, overlaid by his own adult experience, had been a little tangled and obscure; Mackinnon's revelations had served to make it orderly, clear, complete. From that tale, half-savage, half-sordid, from that tragedy of the Falshaws, from that confusion of sombre lusts, and unclean, carnal miseries, there emerged the figure of the child Effy, tender, luminous, spiritual, unspeakably lovable and pure.

He knew now what had happened to him. He had been made the vehicle of that spirit; he had been possessed, divinely coerced by Effy. What he had seen he had seen with Effy's eyes, with Effy's awful innocence and terror. He had slipped the intangible bonds, to become one (Heaven knew how) with that slender, fragile being, broken by the invasion of a knowledge out of all proportion to its understanding. For Effy's vision of evil had been thus immense and horrible because it had been so obscure, so unintelligible. He could not doubt that he had shared to some extent the child's malady.

But all that had been only for a moment. What really possessed him and remained with him was Effy's passion. Effy's passion (for the mother who had not loved her) was *the* supernatural thing, the possessing, pursuing, unappeasably crying thing that haunted the Falshaws' house. Effy's passion was indestructible. It was set free of time and of mortality. He could not detach Effy from her passion and think of her as in a place apart. Where it was there she was also.

As far as Garvin could make out from his experience, the place of the blessed or of the unblest was not by any means a place apart. There were no bounds and partitions between flesh and spirit, the visible and invisible. He had seen Effy's spirit as flesh.

He asked himself why he had seen it? Why he and not any of the Falshaws of whose flesh she was? Falshaw and Anny had given him a hint. He saw Effy because he was not afraid to see her. Fear was the great blinder and divider. Falshaw could see that.

But hadn't Falshaw, in his moment of inspiration, seen further? Wasn't it Effy's pity that had spared them? She hadn't hurt them—she had never hurt anyone in her life. She hadn't pressed them hard.

Under Effy's pressure, her continual pursuing of him, Garvin's "Why?" had come to mean "For what reason? To what end?"

Mackinnon's story had enlightened him. He was the intercessor between Effy's passion and the Falshaws' fear.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

Effy's suffering had endured with her indestructible, unappeasable passion. It was through him, Garvin, that her passion clamoured for satisfaction and her suffering for rest.

She had come back (so he made it out) to recover the love that had been withheld from her. She pursued them all; but, if her father and Anny were afraid of her, her mother was mortally afraid. And it was her mother that she wanted to get at. She could only get at her mother through Garvin, who had no fear.

It was clear to Garvin that Mrs. Falshaw divined what purpose he had been put to. Her fear divined it. And how, he now asked himself, was he, the intercessor, going to break down her fear? Plainly she, like her husband, was relying on Effy's pity to protect her from the vision of Effy. It was a sort of moral support to her; and morally the woman was already so shattered and undermined that to break any prop might bring down the whole structure. Mackinnon had warned him of that. And there was her state to be considered. He had been at Falshaw's now for nearly a month. It wanted but seven weeks of her time. But it was borne in upon Garvin that if he waited till *afterwards* it would be too late—for Effy.

If he were responsible for Mrs. Falshaw, how about his responsibility to Effy? That—seeing the incredible relation in which he stood to her—was unmistakable; it was supreme. And couldn't he, who knew her, rely upon Effy too?

He watched his opportunity for three days. Then, on the evening of the third day, the last of August, the thing was taken out of his hands. Mrs. Falshaw sent for him of her own accord.

She was sitting in her chair in the kitchen and excused herself from rising as he entered. There was nothing unusual in her appearance—nothing, as far as he could see, premonitory. What he did notice was the unabated fear in her eyes as she fixed them on him. She was holding something hidden in her lap.

A chair had been placed for Garvin close beside her.

"Mr. Garvin," she said, "d'ye know it'll be a month to-morrow you've been here? I didn't look for ya to stop soa long."

"Why shouldn't I? You've been very good to me."

"Good to ya? Who wouldn' be good to ya? You're a good man, Mr. Garvin, else you'd a been afeard to stop. You'd 'ave tuk and roon like the rest of 'em."

She brooded. Garvin sought for words to break the intolerable silence, and found none.

"Ah can't blaame 'em. Ah'm afeard myself."

"There's no need. It's not a thing to be afraid of. It's a thing to pity, Mrs. Falshaw—and to love. Such a little thing."

She looked at him. Her obscure soul was at his feet. Up till now she had not known the extent and substance of his knowledge; but now she knew. It was not only that she respected him as one who had seen the thing she feared and had not feared it. She yearned to him; she longed

THE INTERCESSOR

for touch with him, as if through him she reached, unterrified, the divine, disastrous vision.

"It's true what they saay?" she said. "You've heard it?"

"I've seen it."

"Tell me what you've seen?" she whispered.

He told her in a few words. He saw her body stiffen as she braced herself to hear him. She heard him in silence until he began witnessing to Effy's form, her face, her features; then she gave a low moan of assent. "Thot's her. Thot's Affy."

She now uncovered the thing she had held hidden in her lap. "Was it like thot?" she said. "Would you know 'er from thot picture?" She gave it him. It was a photograph of a much younger child than Effy as he had seen her.

He hesitated. "Yes. Just. She's a little older than this and thinner—ever so much thinner."

"Thot's Affy at three year old. She was seven when she died. She'd be ten year old to-day. To-day's 'er birthday."

Garvin got on with his tale as far as the child's coming to his bed. He told how he had received the little thing and had warmed it at his side. Hitherto Mrs. Falshaw had sat rigid and constrained, as if she held herself back from realisation of the thing she feared; but at that touch she trembled and broke down.

"You let 'er stay?" she cried. "You didn't send 'er away? You let little Affy stay with you?"

She drew back again and paused.

"She comes to you in 'er little night-shift?"

"Yes."

He wondered why she should ask him that and in that accent of fear made vehement.

"Thot's how ah'm *afeard* of seeing 'er."

She leaned forward to him.

"There's times, Mr. Garvin, when ah'm scairt for ma life o' seeing 'er, any way. And when the fear taks hold o' me, it strikes through, as if it wud kill the child. And so 'twull, so 'twull. 'Tisn' likely as ah should bear a living child. Ah'm not fit to 'ave un."

"Don't think of it," said Garvin.

"Thinking doan't mak' no difference. I doan't care," she cried savagely, "if 'tis killed."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Falshaw. Think of your husband."

That was not judicious of Garvin, as he saw. It stirred Mrs. Falshaw's devil from its sleep.

"Falshaw!" She spat his name out. "'E thinks child-bearing's the only cure for all a woman's suffering."

"He has suffered, too," said Garvin.

She softened. "'E's sot on it," she said. "'E saays if there's a child about the plaace, there'll be an end of the trooble. But I tall 'im if Affy's here, and she knaws, and she sees me takken oop with another child, 'twill be worse trooble for 'er then than 'tis now."

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

"You know what her trouble was and is."

She said nothing.

"And you know that at this moment, in this room, there's nothing between you and Effy but your fear."

"My little Affy! 'Tis more than that. If ah weren't afeard ah should see 'er, ah knaw. But if ah were a good woman ah shouldn't be afeard."

As she said it Garvin felt a light breath on the back of his neck. He turned and saw the child standing behind his chair. It slid past his shoulder, and he saw it now in the open space between him and the hearth-stone, facing Mrs. Falshaw. It advanced, solicitous, adventurous. It put out its hand and, with a touch that must have fallen light as thistle-down, it stroked its mother's face.

Mrs. Falshaw shrank slightly and put up her hands to ward it off, and the child slid back again. Garvin cried out, "Don't send her away—don't, for God's sake, send her away!"

Mrs. Falshaw and Effy seemed both unconscious of his cry.

He saw the child approach again fearlessly. It smiled, as with an unearthly pity and comprehension (he could not tell whether Effy had learnt this sad wisdom on earth, or in the place of the blessed). The look was superhuman. Urged by the persistence of its passion, the child hovered for a moment, divinely coercing, divinely caressing; its touch fell now on its mother's hair, now on her cheek, now on her lips, and lingered there.

And then the woman writhed and flung herself backwards in her chair away from it. Her face was convulsed with a hideous agony of fear. Then, even to Garvin's sight, Effy vanished.

That night Mrs. Falshaw was delivered of a dead child.

XII

That was at midnight.

An hour before, Garvin had been roused out of his bed by Falshaw knocking at his door. He flung on his clothes and went to fetch Mackinnon.

The doctor was up till dawn with Mrs. Falshaw. When he looked in again at noon of the next day he found the woman doing well. Her body, he said, was as strong as any horse.

He took Garvin away with him and put him up at his own house. It was better both for him and the Falshaws that he should be out of the way. Garvin was worrying. He held himself responsible for the event. Having been assured four times that Mrs. Falshaw's body was out of danger, he insisted on his fear as to her mind. Mackinnon had said himself that she would go off her head. Did Mackinnon think now that that was at all likely?

The doctor was cautious. He wouldn't swear to Mrs. Falshaw's mind. It might be better, or it might be worse. So far there had been no disturbing symptoms. She had behaved just like any other woman.

THE INTERCESSOR

She had asked for the dead baby, and Falshaw had fetched it and put it in her arms. Mackinnon had left her looking at it. There was no distress. On the contrary, she was placid and curiously appeased. The mere act of child-bearing, Mackinnon declared, was sometimes enough to set a woman straight who had been queer before it. And Mrs. Falshaw had been decidedly queer.

Mackinnon was now steeped in the physical aspects of the case; and when Garvin dwelt morbidly on his own possible share in it, he became almost grossly derisive, and refused to listen to any other view. He was fantastically fertile in suggesting things that Garvin might just as well suppose. But when Garvin began to tell him about the latest appearance of the child, he was angry and got up and left him. There was a real child in the village, he said, whom he had to attend to.

That was about nine o'clock in the evening. Garvin had settled himself comfortably in Mackinnon's study with a book, when he was told that Mr. Falshaw was outside and wanted to see him. It wasn't the doctor, it was Mr. Garvin, the maid was sure of it, that he had said he must see.

Garvin went to Falshaw. He was standing in the door of the doctor's house. The lamp-light on his face showed it fallen and undone. He held, half-hidden under his arm, an oblong thing covered with a black cloth.

His wife, he said, wanted to see Garvin. She was in an awful way. They could do nothing with her. She kept on calling for Mr. Garvin. They couldn't get the child away from her to bury it (he glanced at the thing he held under his arm).

Garvin left a message for Mackinnon and went out with Falshaw.

The short cut from the village was a mile and a half by the lane through the Bottom. As they trudged through the dark, Falshaw, between fits of silence, took up his tale. He'd been up to the village to fetch the coffin. The child was to be buried in the morning soon after daybreak. And the trouble was that its mother wouldn't hear of the burying. She'd got the child in the bed with her and she wouldn't let it go. They'd taken it from her when she was asleep and laid it on the cot in the back-room, and the nurse, she'd dressed it pretty. They were at their supper, and the nurse was out of the wife's room but five minutes when Sarah she'd up and she'd got, somehow stealthy, into the back-room and taken the child. And she turned mad-like when they tried to take it from her.

"An' what she saays is, Mr. Garvin, that you know all about it."

The high village road dropped to the lane. A mile off a solitary light shone in the Bottom. Coming from the village, they approached the house from the back, and Garvin saw that the light came from the long garret, Effy's garret, where the dead child had been laid.

Falshaw put the coffin in there and took Garvin to his wife's room.

Mrs. Falshaw lay in a big bed facing the door. A candle burned on the table beside her. A nurse sat at the head of the bed and Anny at the foot. Mrs. Falshaw lay slant-wise on her left side with her back

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

turned to them. The candle-light fell full on her and left the watchers in shadow.

Falshaw took Garvin by the arm and led him to the bedside. They stood there without speaking, made dumb by what they saw.

The bed-clothes were turned back a little on this side, and in the uncovered space the dead child, wrapped in a flannel, lay cradled in its mother's left arm. With her left hand she held it tight against her side, with her right she supported her own sagging breast and pressed the nipple to its shut mouth.

Her face, thinned and smoothed, refined beyond Garvin's recognition, brooded over the dead face, in the stillness, the stupefaction, of desire accomplished.

"It's Affy. It's little Affy," she said. "She's afeard to suck."

"Thot's how she keeps on," said Falshaw.

"She's afeard o' me. She's afeard of her mother. You speak to 'er, Mr. Garvin, and tell 'er not to be afeard."

Garvin bent over the body, and she whispered fiercely, "You tell little Affy, sir."

"Let me look," said Garvin.

Mrs. Falshaw closed her eyes. As Garvin laid his hand on the dead child she drew back a little. Her breast dropped from its dead lips.

"Now," he heard Falshaw muttering at his elbow. And some innermost voice in him replied, "Not yet."

"There's Affy now. Standing by the doorway."

Garvin saw her.

It was Anny who had spoken.

She rose, fascinated; and Falshaw turned. They stood motionless, gazing at Effy as she came. Their lips were parted slightly. It was evident that they felt no fear. They were charmed, rather, as at the approach of some wonderful, shining thing. (The nurse sat on, stolidly unconscious.)

"She's gone," said Anny.

She had passed out of their momentary vision. Her business was not with them.

She came—Garvin saw her—no longer solicitous, adventurous, but with a soft and terrible swiftness, an irresistible urgency.

As Garvin stooped suddenly and lifted the dead child from the bed, he saw Effy slide through his hands into its place. In Mrs. Falshaw's eyes there was neither fear nor any discernment of the substitution; yet she saw as he saw. She saw with sanity. Her arms pressed the impalpable creature, as it were flesh to flesh; and Garvin knew that Effy's passion was appeased.

EPILOGUE

A year later Garvin was on Dartmoor, working up Stone Circles for the County History. A letter from Mackinnon reached him there. It came as an answer to his wonder.

"There's a man in your trade living at Falshaw's. He doesn't see or

THE INTERCESSOR

hear things ; and he's there for nerves, too. They tell me nothing *has* been seen or heard since you left.

"Mrs. Falshaw often talks about you. I saw her the other day, and she desired, almost with tears, to be remembered to you. The point she insists on is that you are a good man. I'm inclined to think, Garvin, that you knew more about that woman than I ever did. She is, I ought to tell you, absolutely sane—has been ever since that night.

"There's a little thing that may interest you. In Mrs. Falshaw's room—you remember it ?—they've got a picture, an enlarged photograph of the child Effy, framed and hung on the wall. Under it there's a shelf with her things—a cup she used to drink out of—some tin animals—a doll. They suggest votive offerings on an altar of the dead. What does it mean ? Just remembrance ? Or—some idea of propitiation ?

"You ought to know."

He did